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SUBJECT: ZIMBABWE'S COLLAPSE A MIXED ECONOMIC BAG FOR
BOTSWANA

11. Summary: Zimbabwean migration has had both negative and positive impact on neighboring Botswana. On the downside, Zimbabweans are widely blamed for increased crime; they are accused of taking jobs from Batswana; and the government has been forced to spend its limited resources on both the deportation of illegal aliens and care for legitimate refugees. However, Botswana has also benefited from large numbers of Zimbabwean professionals and skilled workers who have settled here, while low-paid unskilled workers have been a boon -- albeit an illegal one -- to the construction and agriculture industries. Zimbabwean migrants' personal and professional ties in Botswana grow as the crisis in their homeland drags on. It is unclear whether they will choose to return home even if Zimbabwe stabilizes, which could jeopardize the potential for a Zimbabwean economic rebound in a post-Mugabe dispensation. End summary.

JUST HOW MANY ZIMBABWEANS ARE HERE?

12. Zimbabwean migration to Botswana is nothing new; thousands of Zimbabweans moved to Botswana after its 1966 independence for political reasons or economic opportunities. However, many returned home after Zimbabwe's 1980 independence. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Africa and Asia Director Ambassador Zibane Nthakwana told Poloff that this post-independence return was actually a blow to Botswana's economy, as the Zimbabwean migrants filled many skilled positions in the private and public sectors, particularly at the nascent University of Botswana. Zimbabwe's political crisis and economic collapse in the late 1990s started the latest round of immigration. Many Zimbabweans have family ties on both sides of the 600 kilometer shared border, and these ties combined with Botswana's booming economy made Botswana -- particularly the northern city of Francistown -- a natural destination for migrants.

13. In meetings with journalists, businessmen, and government officials, Poloff repeatedly asked for estimates of how many Zimbabwean -- legal and illegal -- are currently living in Botswana, but no one could provide an official estimate.

Ntakhwana noted that the GOB is currently deporting about 3,000 illegal Zimbabweans a month, but that this probably represents just the tip of the iceberg. Ultimately, he said that Zimbabwean residents likely number in the hundreds of thousands, but were impossible to count given the large number of undocumented migrants.

DOWNSIDES FOR BOTSWANA...

¶4. If you ask Batswana about the impact of Zimbabwean immigration, the first thing most mention is crime. Zimbabweans, they say, are responsible for a significant increase in crime the country has seen in the past five years, particularly stock theft and petty crimes like housebreaking and theft. One Francistown journalist told Poloff that violent crime in that town was "unheard of" before the influx of Zimbabweans, while another claimed that up to 90 percent of sex workers around Francistown are Zimbabwean. However, it is difficult to find statistics to document these perceptions. Police statistics show that crime has increased for several years, but it is not clear whether Zimbabweans are to blame, as police contacts were unable to provide statistics regarding the nationality of arrested criminals. There are some cases in which Zimbabweans are unfairly blamed for crime. For example, Gadzani Mhotsha, Secretary General of the Botswana Federation of Trade Unions, said that his family members on the border

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recently had cattle stolen, and after following the tracks, they found that the rustlers had taken the cattle toward Zimbabwe, but then crossed back into Botswana, attempting to make it look like the rustlers were Zimbabwean.

¶5. Batswana also complain that Zimbabweans take jobs from locals, particularly unskilled jobs. Mhotsha notes that despite strict rules about hiring non-citizens, businesses -- particularly in the construction and agriculture sectors -- frequently hire Zimbabwean workers for far less than the law would mandate a Motswana be paid. Skilled professions are also effected. Some private schools hire Zimbabwean teachers for about P2,500 (about \$400) per month instead of the P6,000 (almost \$1,000) per month a Motswana would demand. According to Botswana Confederation of Commerce, Industry, and Manpower (BOCCIM) Deputy Executive Director Norman Moleele, the lure of cheap, skilled, and enthusiastic Zimbabwean labor is hard to resist for many employers, particularly small businesses.

...BUT SKILLS TRANSFER, TRADE BOLSTERS ECONOMY

¶6. Though its economy performs well, Botswana is a small country (less than 2 million citizens) with many capacity constraints, and so despite the downsides of Zimbabwean immigration, everyone interviewed by Poloff acknowledged that the skills brought to Botswana by educated Zimbabwean migrants are valuable. Maleele said Botswana's employers, particularly in white collar industries, love employing Zimbabweans -- they are generally highly educated and work much harder than many young Batswana, whom Maleele described as increasingly entitled and lazy.

¶7. Cross-border commerce also has boosted Botswana business in recent years, particularly in Francistown, although the stabilization of the Zimbabwean economy due to dollarization has slowed this. According to local journalists, from about 2006-2008 Francistown was practically overrun by Zimbabwean shoppers, leading to shortages and massive queues, particularly during the holidays. The last year has seen a sharp decline in shoppers coming to stock up on bulk food items, although they now buy cheap, Chinese-made electronics

to resell in Zimbabwe.

WILL THEY EVER GO HOME?

18. Should the political and economic situation improve in Zimbabwe, the question remains whether Zimbabwean workers will go home. Ntakhwana has his doubts, particularly about educated workers who are likely to be very skeptical about change and wary of leaving stable jobs. Botswana are generally welcoming toward Zimbabweans, particularly skilled professionals, and this may entice them to stay. Unskilled workers may be less comfortable and more likely to return home, but they are not nearly as crucial to Zimbabwe's long-term economic recovery.

19. Shingirai Madondoe, a Zimbabwean journalist resident in Francistown who is in his early 30s, also has his doubts. QFrancistown who is in his early 30s, also has his doubts. Asked if he will return, he told Poloff "no" flat out. He is married to a Motswana, they have children, and he is eligible for Botswana citizenship (a foreigner who marries a Motswana may become a citizen after two years). He noted that nearly all of his friends from secondary school are in similar circumstances -- living abroad; starting families; and establishing themselves in careers. Why, he asked, would educated professionals in their prime years want to disrupt lives they've established and return home to an uncertain future? It's a good question with no easy answers, but one

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that will have to be addressed for the sake of Zimbabwe's future.
NOLAN